



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Out of the window, over his head, she could see the tree where millions of tiny new buds were beginning. So it would begin over and over, she thought, always and always, miracles on Maple Hill.”

-From *Miracles on Maple Hill*, by Virginia Sorensen

As of October 25, I have a new job at the Albany Library: Children’s librarian. This move from Young Adult librarian is exciting and I’m looking forward to spending my work days in the Children’s section.

I am aware, however, that even though I read to my children and even though I spent time as a Bookmobile children’s librarian, I am not necessarily up-to-date on current children’s literature. So, I have been reading, reading, reading. I fill my workbag with shiny picture books and series paperbacks and, this week, piles of books that have the Newbery Award medal on the front.

The first Newbery book I pulled out of the bag was Christopher Paul Curtis’ *Bud, not Buddy*. This book is about a young boy, Bud (not Buddy) who goes in search of his father. He is a proud, tough, resourceful child who is making discoveries about the world, learning whom to trust and

how to act. His thoughts and his actions are reflections of each other and even when he is not straightforward in his interactions with the adults he encounters, he is straightforward with the reader. We come to care about him, and are exhilarated by his accomplishments and moved by his challenges. And because we are so engaged, he becomes a character we will remember.

Another memorable character is Dicey, in *Dicey’s Song*, by Cynthia Voigt. I liked this book so much that when I finished it, even as the tears were still rolling down my face, I decided I would buy a copy for each of my children. But when I talked to my oldest daughter, she had a totally different opinion. “I got so impatient with that character,” she told me, to my surprise. I felt like saying “My Dicey?” as if she had somehow become another person in my life.

But I can see why she felt this way. Dicey is a young girl

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who is trying to find her way from being the sole caretaker for her younger siblings to having help from her Gram, who is a caring but not demonstrative grandmother. Dicey is belligerent, smart and creative, and it takes her a while to become more connected to those who have come to love her. She is honest and searching – much like Buddy – and a strong heroine worth knowing.

In *Miracles on Maple Hill* we again have a scrappy, resourceful and capable character, Marly, who is willing to work hard and learn from her mistakes. By the time I finished this book, I was ready to learn how to tap maple trees, milk goats and build fences. This reaction made me wonder how this generation’s children react. Do they also feel inspired to get to work? Does a simple life appeal to them the way it did to me? Or do they have other dreams?

And is this kind of longing for an I-can-do-it-myself sense of accomplishment one of the attractions of these award-winning books?

I think maybe it is. Maybe tilling a field or making a loaf of bread or knitting a sweater are all clear ways we can get this feeling. And maybe imagining a life full of such visible accomplishments is what pulls children (and some adults!) into these stories. They make us feel ready to take on the world and it’s a great feeling.